

00:00:00	Music	Transition	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:00:01	Promo	Promo	Speaker: <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.
00:00:13	Music	Transition	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> “Huddle Formation” from the album <i>Thunder, Lightning, Strike</i> by The Go! Team. A fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.
00:00:21	Jesse Thorn	Host	It’s <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. There are a lot of funny and strange characters on the hit HBO drama, <i>Succession</i> . For my money, though, none of them funnier or stranger than Connor Roy. He’s the oldest of the Roy children on the show, half-brother to the three younger ones. And Connor is kind of a doofus. He falls in love with an escort, he bankrolls her disastrous Off-Broadway play, he runs for president and never at any point does he earn even an ounce of respect from a single family member. And that probably isn’t a coincidence, because Connor is the only sibling with no interest in running the Roy family business.
			My guest, Alan Ruck, plays Connor Roy. He’s so great—funny and weird when the scene calls for it but also behind the bluster and the rants about biodynamic wine and tax policy, we see a vulnerability. It makes Connor weirdly one of the most relatable characters on the show. Now, you might know Alan Ruck from <i>Ferris Bueller’s Day Off</i> . He played Cameron, the best friend with the Ferrari. He also had parts in movies like <i>Speed</i> , <i>Twister</i> , and <i>Cheaper by the Dozen</i> , and in TV shows like <i>Spin City</i> and <i>The Exorcist</i> . Now, before we get into my conversation with Alan Ruck, let’s hear something from <i>Succession</i> .
00:02:03	Sound Effect	Transition	His character, Connor Roy, is running for president. But the campaign never takes off, and in this scene he’s at a party with the rest of the family. Greg, his cousin, asks him how he’s polling. Music swells and fades.
00:02:04	Clip	Clip	<i>[The sounds of a dinner service.]</i> Greg (<i>Succession</i>): Nice! What are you at, now? Connor: Solid. Still holding. Speaker 1: Yeah, at 1%. Connor: It’s just—the fear is in these last days, it could get squeezed. Greg: Squeezed down? Speaker 1: Mm-hm. Greg: From one? ‘Cause that’s the lowest number possible. Connor: Uh, no, it’s—you know, decimals. You know, they’re saying that I could need to get aggressive in certain media markets, because both sides are trying to squeeze my percent.

Speaker 1: Well, that's greedy. Even when they have all the other percents.

Connor: I know. But then, it gets awfully spendy to get aggressive.

Speaker 1: Like how much?

Connor: Like another hundred mil.

Greg: *[Stammering.]* One hundred million—

Speaker 2: Wow! I mean, and so what would you get for that? I mean, could you win?

Speaker 1: *[Chuckles.]* Good lord, no.

Connor: N-no. No. Uh, that won't move the needle. No. The hope is that would maintain—maintain my percent.

Speaker 2: Okay. And for your percent you get?

Speaker 1: He gets a place in the conversation.

Greg: Which is great, 'cause conversation's important to be inside of.

Speaker 1: Mm-hm.
Music swells and fades.

00:03:02	Sound Effect	Transition
00:03:06	Jesse	Host

[They laugh.]

00:03:08	Alan Ruck	Guest	Alan Ruck, welcome to <i>Bullseye</i> .
00:03:09	Jesse	Host	Hey! Thanks for having me.
00:03:12	Alan	Guest	I love the idea of "my percent".
00:03:17	Jesse	Host	That's not nothing! You know, I mean that's at least a million people. So.
00:03:19	Alan	Guest	I mean, that's—that's Howard Schultz territory. That's the big stuff.
00:03:21	Jesse	Host	That's quite a following.
00:03:25	Alan	Guest	Yeah. I mean, that guy had to invent coffee or whatever to get his 1%.
00:03:26	Jesse	Host	<i>[Laughing.]</i> Did he?
00:03:30	Alan	Guest	I think. I don't know! Is that what Starbucks is? You invented coffee, right?
00:03:35	Jesse	Host	I think so, yeah. It was just mud before he arrived, and he made it elegant.
00:03:52	Alan	Guest	Yeah. <i>[Laughs.]</i> So, you sort of backed into the audition for <i>Succession</i> . It's not like it was a big scheme of yours. And you wandered into the audition room relatively unprepared, because you just hadn't had the time.
			Yeah. I mean, I had been working—I was working in Chicago with Geena Davis on the TV version of <i>The Exorcist</i> . And I would fly home to LA for long weekends. And my wife was shooting a show for ABC where they worked like 16-hour days. It was brutal. And she was just played out. Because we had help, but then at night she was a single parent and just really, really exhausted.

00:04:19	Jesse	Host	And you're both working actors, so you're both like—to have children with the travel and the bonkers hours of acting—
00:04:27	Alan	Guest	It's nutty, yeah.
00:04:28	Jesse	Host	You have to kind of like do this complicated coordination.
00:04:31	Alan	Guest	And sometimes it doesn't work exactly as you would like it to, 'cause sometimes you are working at the exact same time, sometimes in different cities or even different countries, and you just have to—you know—try to keep it together. So, you know, thank god for Facetime and Zoom and all these things. But anyway, I had come home for the weekend. I was gonna fly back late Monday afternoon to go back to Chicago, and my wife said, "I want you to go with me and Larkin," our little boy, "to Mommy and Me music class, Monday morning."
			And I said, "I'm there."
00:05:06	Jesse	Host	And this is like—when—this sounds like the kind of request that matters.
00:05:11	Alan	Guest	Well, yeah. I mean, you know, as Brian Cox has often said: "Happy wife, happy life." And I believe in that. Pretty much right after, she said I want you to go to Mommy and Me music class, my manager—Mark Teitelbaum—called and said, "I've got an audition for you for an HBO show!"
			And I was like, "Oh!" And I said, "Mireille, audition for an HBO show."
			And she burst into tears. She just—she was just—you know, really vulnerable. And I said, "Mark, I can't do it. I gotta—I gotta go to this thing with my wife and my baby boy."
			And we went and, you know, we banged on drums for an hour. And you have to leave your phone outside. And I came out, and there were emails and text messages and voice messages, and they all just said, "Before you leave town, just go to Adam McKay's house."
			<i>[Jesse chuckles.]</i>
00:06:06	Jesse	Host	Okay! And so—
00:06:07	Alan	Guest	It's happened to all of us. Yeah! And so, I did. And I really didn't know the material. And I told Adam, I said, "I haven't really had the time to get familiar with this."
			And he said, "Well, you know the situation, right?" Yeah. He said, "Make it up. Just whatever comes out of your mouth." And I read with Francine Maisler, and she read the actual words, and I made up whatever seemed appropriate. And the biggest clue I got from that session was the line that at that point was addressed to Logan, where Connor says, "There's this job I want, and it's called President of the United States."
			And I said to Adam, "Okay, clearly he's putting the old man on."
			And Adam was like, "Oh no. No, he's deadly serious." And so, that's when I knew—big window, big clue as to who this guy was and what kind of world he was living in. And—

00:06:58	Jesse	Host	<i>[Stammering.]</i> This is—I wanna ask you about this specifically, right? Because like one of the things about <i>Succession</i> is that the characters are all from space. They all—other than the paterfamilias, they’re all from space. None of them has lived in any kind of normal life. But—and they are in many ways blinkered idiots, but they are also totally not. Like, they have such an odd mix of competency and incompetency.
00:07:31	Alan	Guest	Right. Well, I mean, if you look at the character of Tom, even though he’s—you know—like a groveling sycophant and sometimes, you know, a little martinet with Greg. And if you look at Greg, who—you know—started out by working in the amusement park and throwing up inside his costume ‘cause he was loaded. I mean, even though they have all these character defects, you might say, because they didn’t grow up with all that privilege, in the long run I think they’re gonna be better off—much better off than the siblings. Because they don’t know anything else. There was that—there was that scene where Logan asks Roman—I can’t remember—I guess it was the second season. “How much does a gallon of milk cost?”
			“Why are you asking me this?!” You know, that’s—you know. And just he was trying to get him back in touch with just like life. Like, that most people have to deal with. And so, they never wanted for anything. They just never had any affection. They never had what you might call a loving parent who was just in their corner no matter what. Certainly not from their mother. The kids had Caroline, and she’s a dragon lady. You know? And then, Logan is so wrapped up in the business. And again, if you don’t—if you don’t produce something that’s valuable to the family name, it’s like, well, you don’t have—you don’t have any value. So, all the money, none of the love. And that’s what shaped these guys.
00:09:15	Jesse	Host	There’s a real signature moment in the pilot of the show where you bring a birthday gift of sourdough starter, which is like—your character is the eldest sibling, and you’re a half-sibling to the other ones. And so, you are of this world in the sense that you believe yourself to be capable of being president of the United States with no basis, but you’re also a visitor to this other closed section of the family, and you’re completely different from them.
00:09:52	Alan	Guest	Yeah. I... I always felt that my own backstory was that Logan divorced Connor’s mother when Connor was eight or nine years old and old enough to know that his father was a titan and that when he was with his dad, things were magical. Doors opened everywhere; people bowed down. And then, that was snatched away from him, and he was stuck living with a woman who had psychological challenges and was chemically addicted and in and out of institutions. And so, it was not a happy boyhood. So, he created an acceptable reality for himself, and the money was there to do that. But he’s always wanted to be accepted, loved by the old man, but by the siblings as well.

And it’s just not happened. And he’s always been a joke to them. I mean, even when he was—you know—a decent guy and taking them on camping trips and whatever because Logan couldn’t be bothered. You know, he was always just dismissible. And so, he’s always been like sort of on the outside of the glass with his nose pressed up against it, knocking, “Hi, guys.” You know. And he has

			no friends. Connor has no friends. He only has these people. He has Willa now, thank god. But he—you know, as we saw in the episode the other night, I mean, he tells—basically, he tells his brothers and his sister that, “I’ve come to expect this from you people. And you know, I don’t need—I don’t need your love.” But it’s not entirely true. <i>[Chuckles.]</i>
00:11:44	Jesse	Host	Well, he’s the sweetest of them, I think. Because he has this sort of wistful, dreamer quality to him. <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:11:52	Alan	Guest	Yeah, there was this—
00:11:53	Jesse	Host	To his evil venality.
00:11:55	Alan	Guest	Well, I mean, he’s just as entitled as the others. You know? And he has no idea what regular people have to go through. And it just—he doesn’t have any, uh, <i>[inaudible]</i> .
00:12:08	Jesse	Host	But you get the impression that to some extent, he doesn’t have any idea what any people have to go through. <i>[Laughs.]</i> Like, he’s just—
00:12:13	Alan	Guest	No! I mean, because he’s—
00:12:14	Jesse	Host	He’s just so sui generous that—
00:12:17	Alan	Guest	You know, I think that Logan—you know, he says things like, “Dad, I need another 100 million for my campaign.” Connor has money. He just doesn’t wanna spend his own money. You know? He’s like, “Daaad.” <i>[Chuckles.]</i> You know. “Can you help me out?” And it’s like, “Oh, I blew all that money on Willa’s play and—you know—I’m a little land rich, cash poor.” Not true. He’s got a ton of money. They all have a ton of money. They just want more. And they don’t wanna spend any of their own money if they can help it.
00:12:48	Jesse	Host	You’re from kind of the furthest thing from the Roy family. You grew up in Cleveland and your father worked in a pharmaceutical factory or in a factory that powdered things in general? Is that true? <i>[Chuckles.]</i>
00:13:05	Alan	Guest	Yeah, he worked for a pharmaceutical job house that was called Strong, Cobb, and Arner. I guess those were the big three back in the day. And it was—
00:13:13	Jesse	Host	In the mortar and pestle business?
00:13:15	Alan	Guest	I think that’s where it started, yeah. He said when he started there in 1949, there was actually still a pill machine. ‘Cause pills are different from capsules or tablets. A pill is just rolled out dough, and then it’s rolled out into like a long spaghetti string, and there’s a little guillotine thing that goes chunk, chunk, chunk, and just chops them into little pills. And I said, “What was that for?”
			He said, “Well, it was for veterinary medicine.” And the man that ran the pill machine was like 90. And as soon as he passed away, they got rid of the pill machine. It was like they were keeping it on for him, I guess. Which is—you know—a nice gesture. But he—
00:13:55	Jesse	Host	Or just no one else knew how to use it.
00:13:57	Alan	Guest	I think that’s probably it. But my dad was not a Walter White. He was a Jesse Pinkman. He was the guy on the floor, giving the recipe like—you know, 40 gallons of this, 80 pounds of this. You know. And he was mixing up huge batches of everything. Like, barbiturates and kid’s vitamins. And it was whatever the order came through, that’s what he did.
00:14:25	Jesse	Host	Did you think that a creative career was available to you? Like, was it something that you dreamed about when you were 12?
00:14:39	Alan	Guest	Right about then. My parents really believed in the arts. My dad made drugs, but he was a singer. He sang in like community choirs

			and church choirs and my mom was a schoolteacher, and just they were both firm believers in education, and they just took us to plays. The Cleveland Art Museum, I don't know if it's still the same way now, but it was free. You just had to get to the museum, and then it was—you know, no admission.
00:15:10	Jesse	Host	Cultural institutions were one of the things that the titans of industry of the early 20 th century were good at.
00:15:16	Alan	Guest	That's right! Because you know, whoever started that in Cleveland, Ohio, could brag to her lady friends in New York City. "Well, what have you done lately?"
			<i>[Chuckling.]</i> "I started an art museum." You know. And that's—so, we all benefited from that. And my house was right down the street from my high school, and you could go see a play at the high school for I think a quarter. And so, we would just do that. We didn't have a lot of money, so we did those things that we could manage. And we saw a lot of plays, went to concerts. And so, there was always music playing in my house.
00:15:53	Jesse	Host	You sang in a chorus, right?
00:15:55	Alan	Guest	Yeah! Uh, my older sister and I were both—she actually played the violin. And so, she was also in the orchestra. But we both sang in choirs all through school. So, yeah. I actually—once I decided on it, I think my parents were thrilled that I had found something. Because I had been a really good student up until puberty.
			<i>[Chuckles.]</i> Then, I—it was over. I just couldn't concentrate on anything. And not athletic, so I think they were just thrilled that I found something that I loved, and I found out I could do. So, they were behind me 100%, which I know other kids don't have that.
00:16:31	Jesse	Host	How old are we—how old are we talking about?
00:16:33	Alan	Guest	Well, I had watched my sister—older sister—do plays in high school. And somehow, I just—I kind of thought that I could do it. You know? And when I was in the 6 th grade, we did a little school—you know, in classroom production of <i>The Legend of Sleepy Hollow</i> , and I was Ichabod. And I got a really good response from the kids in the class. And I was like, oh yeah! I like this! And then, I got to high school, and there were acting classes and play production classes and three productions a year. It was a pretty good program. And I just auditioned for that first play, and I found out I could do it. And I just never let go of it.
00:17:14	Jesse	Host	We've got even more with Alan Ruck. When we come back from the break, I will talk to him about the time he spent out of work—which was a not insignificant portion of his career—and how not working led him to get sober. It's <i>Bullseye</i> , from MaximumFun.org and NPR.
00:17:33	Music	Transition	Chiming synth with a syncopated beat.
00:17:38	Jesse	Host	Welcome back to <i>Bullseye</i> . I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Alan Ruck. He plays Connor Roy on the TV show <i>Succession</i> . He also starred in <i>Ferris Bueller's Day Off</i> and on the TV shows <i>Spin City</i> and <i>The Exorcist</i> . The fourth and final season of <i>Succession</i> is airing right now on HBO. Let's get back into our conversation.

Did you like the musical theatre experience of putting on a show and earning the attention of the audience? Or did you like the disappearing and pretending to be somebody else/sometimes not having to be yourself part of it?

00:18:24	Alan	Guest	That's still... really enjoyable, because if you play someone who is a complete bastard, hopefully you get all that junk out of yourself at work, and you can go home and be a proper human. So, that's always been fun. You know, it was fun to be onstage in those early days. And realizing that I had some little bit of power, you know—people were watching me and if I did my job right, they would keep watching me. And I loved that attention. I loved that feeling. I felt empowered! You know? I just felt like, yeah. I found out who I was. Or I found out who this part of me is. So, that was all—all that stuff was—I'm not really a disappearing kind of actor. I think I'm mostly—some people say that, you know, there's chameleons there's personality actors. I guess I'm more of a personality actor. Sometimes it feels like I'm just Alan in different clothes.
00:19:32	Jesse	Host	But you know, that's okay. I mean— Sometimes you're the jerk version, and sometimes you're the sweet version. <i>[Alan agrees.]</i>
00:19:39	Alan	Guest	You're usually a sweeter jerk and a jerkier sweetheart. <i>[Chuckles.]</i> Ah, yeah. A jerky sweetheart. That's a good title for my memoirs. But if you look at somebody like Jack Nicholson. You know, I mean, brilliant movie—American treasure, really. He's almost always just played Jack Nicholson, but he's played every note. You know, every color in that rainbow. He's played every conceivable version of Jack Nicholson. I remember one time that he did a character in <i>Prizzi's Honor</i> , but that's the only time I can remember he actually like tried a different voice and—you know. But so, I mean if it's good enough for him, it's good enough for me.
00:20:20	Jesse	Host	Did you move to Chicago think you were gonna be a Theatre Actor, capital T, capital A? <i>[Alan laughs.]</i>
00:20:30	Alan	Guest	Like, were you like, "I can finally indulge my passion for Shakespeare," kind of thing? I did some Shakespeare at college. I did one Shakespearian play in high school. I did some at college, at university. And—
00:20:38	Jesse	Host	But you know what I—like, there's this thing in acting school where just like every teacher goes to you—every theatre teacher I ever had had a part of the class where they said, <i>[dramatically]</i> "If the boards are not your blood, then do not pursue this career. Your passion for the stage must take precedence over anything else in your life."
00:20:58	Alan	Guest	Where did you go to school? <i>[They laugh.]</i>
00:21:01	Jesse	Host	Some of the best at UC Santa Cruz, I'll tell you.
00:21:03	Alan	Guest	Oh, yeah, okay! Yeah! I see you. Banana slugs, right?
00:21:05	Jesse	Host	Yeah. School of the Arts. In high school is where I had the better theatre teachers.
00:21:09	Alan	Guest	That's a nice place to go to college, though, Santa Cruz.
00:21:11	Jesse	Host	It's lovely. It's very pretty. The weather's nice.
00:21:14	Alan	Guest	Yeah. I mean, there was—you know. There were people that you could say had different levels of development, even people who had

had professional experience. Some were very good and very open to what this life can be or what it actually winds up being. And some people sort of had stunted growth and that sort of thing. Like, if you don't—you know, the only real actors are theatre actors. And that's where most of us start out! Because most of us don't live in a major motion picture center. New York, Los Angeles, Chicago. I grew up in Cleveland. There was—you know, there were no opportunities like that.

So, it was plays. And I enjoyed it, and I loved it for a long time. I enjoyed that feeling of feeling the audience out there, and you do it together. But now, I'm older and I really love the civility of the motion picture business. *[Laughs.]*

00:22:21 Jesse Host
00:22:23 Alan Guest
00:22:26 Jesse Host

Are you just talking about craft services or what?

That—I mean, if craft service is wrong, the movie's gonna suck.

If theatres didn't—if theatre had unlimited Red Vines, then you'd be in.

00:22:30 Alan Guest

I might be! I might be. No, it's the eight shows a week thing that I just think kind of kicks my *[censored]*. I actually haven't done a play for 17 years, 'cause the last play I did, I met Mireille, my wife. And she was really good in that play, but the best thing for me about that play was that I found her. But I'm not—I might. Never say never. I might do something again, but it would have to be really special. I don't feel driven to get up onstage in front of people. I actually enjoy being in front of a camera.

00:23:06 Jesse Host

When you were doing theatre in your 20s, in Chicago, were you playing characters much younger than you?

[Alan confirms.]

00:23:19 Alan Guest

'Cause you looked—you looked boyish well into your 30s. Yeeeah. Yeah. My first professional play was called *Album* by a guy named David Rimmer. And it had been sort of an Off-Off-Broadway hit in New York and then some guys in Chicago talked the New York people into doing a Chicago production. Jason Brett and Stuart Oak and those are the guys that gave me my first job. Producers and... I aged in that play from 14 to 18. And I was 24 playing a 14-year-old. And you know, people bought it. And so, I just looked infantile. *[Laughs.]*

00:24:01 Jesse Host

I mean, there's—it's—there's two sides of that coin, right? One is you could feel trapped in adolescence and, you know, maybe you're out there onstage and you wish ladies in the audience thought you were hot and actually they think you're a little boy and like those kinds of things. On the other hand, you were probably a lot better at acting than most 15-year-olds, and so it's a *[chuckles]*—it's a lane. You know what I mean?

00:24:32 Alan Guest

Yeah, yeah. I mean, well, it was my way in. And so, I got to do that, and it was—you know—a blessing and a curse, because you would be in situations like one of the first movies I did. I was working with Johnny Cusack, who's 10 years younger than me, and we were playing the same age. And certain people would talk down to us. You know, like we were dumb babies, and I found that particularly offensive.

00:25:00 Jesse Host
00:25:02 Alan Guest

Because he was a dumb baby, but you were older.

But he was actually not a dumb baby. He was like 16 going on 40. He was one of those guys that I needed to go to college to grow up

and to like, you know, have parties and just take the time to grow up. He was one of those kids at 16, he was ready to go. He was just ready to hit it. He came from a showbusiness family. His dad made documentaries and all the kids were involved in Byrne Piven's workshop in Chicago. You know, just a really creative and highly literate family, and John's just like, "I don't need—why would I need—?" He wasn't even convinced he needed to graduate from high school. He was just ready, and he was! You know? 'Cause it was a couple of years after that, he did—maybe one or two years after that, he did *A Sure Thing*, the Rob Reiner picture.

And I mean, he was 18 years old, and he carried that movie effortlessly. You know? So, that's just—everybody's different. Everybody's got a different story. But he was—he was... what's the word? He was a force of nature. *[Chuckles.]*

00:26:17 Jesse Host I didn't know how old you were when you were in *Ferris Bueller*, which is like in your late 20s. You were 28/29.

[Alan confirms.]

And learning about it, I thought two things. One is, I mean, you're so wonderful in the movie that it's very easy to accept you as whatever age you're presenting yourself to be, 'cause you're just like, "Look at this lovely man." Like, "Look at this guy! What a charmer! What a sweetheart." The other thing I thought is like this is a—you know, it wasn't quite the big break then that it might seem to be now. It was, you know—it wasn't a generation defining film upon its release. It—you know—gained steam. But like, still. Huge job, co-star of a big movie. But also, *[chuckles]* like you're 29. So, you don't get to like—you didn't get to have a run of being a teen, because you were already not a teen. Not credibly.

00:27:19 Alan Guest Yeah, it—no. That was like my swan song for, you know, the teenage thing. And you know, I got away with it! But soon after that, people were like, "Well, now, he's—no." And people knew, I mean in the business, how old I was. So, like, "No, no, we really need someone who's—you know—a teenager or maybe like 20." And here, I was like ten years older. So, it just—

00:27:46 Jesse Host But you're also like a sweet-faced 30-year-old and what do—? It's—
00:27:51 Alan Guest I was in a weird—

00:27:52 Jesse Host Right! That's what I mean.

00:27:53 Alan Guest It was before the *Friends* thing kind of happened, where it was like they're 25 and—you know—let's build a show around these 20-somethings. Because the stuff that was—I was auditioning for, they were... uh, it was like nobody bought me as a lawyer. They're like, "Nah, he just—nah, he's too young. He's too young. He's too young." And so, I just—I fell into this period where I couldn't seem to get cast. And I had a couple of years where I actually didn't work, and I was very frustrated, and I kind of thought that was it. I thought that was my run.

00:28:32 Jesse Host So, 1986, you're in *Ferris Bueller*. Big movie. But you're at the very, very far edge cusp of being able to be the thing that is in the movie. Right? These people that are in these John Hughes movies, they got to be that for five years.

00:28:47 Alan Guest 'Cause they were that!

00:28:48 Jesse Host Right! And you're—you've aged out by the time the movie's in the theatres.

[Alan agrees.]

So, you're in this weird interregnum period, and it got to the point at one point where you moved out to LA to work on a TV show. The TV show didn't work, and you had a kid, and had to stop working as an actor for a minute.

00:29:13 Alan Guest

Yeah, I did. I had done this pilot with Nell Carter and everybody thought it was gonna go 'cause she had a deal with NBC. And it was—the pilot just was terrible. It was just terrible. It was—they were trying to figure it out as they went along, and it just—they had one idea and it didn't work, and then it just—you know. They all went on to other things, which is great. But yeah, I was—I was broke. I had spent all my money moving my stuff from New York to a place out here. And then, I thought, "Well, I gotta do something." So, I went to an employment agency, and this is how long ago this was. They were like, "Can you do word processing?"

[Laughs.]

00:29:56 Jesse Host

No. "Any office experience whatsoever?" No. No. That's when you needed to prove what WPM you had when you went in.

[Alan laughs and agrees.]

00:30:14 Alan Guest

I had to do a—when I was just out of college, I went into a couple of temp agencies. I never got a gig, but they put you in a typing test like it was a secretarial pool in *Mad Men*.

00:30:23 Jesse Host

I wasn't even gonna subject myself to that, because I—it just would've been humiliating. So, they sent me to work at Sears Warehouse in east LA.

00:30:26 Alan Guest

The big building with the big tower and it's all still there? It's got the big sign on it?

00:30:32 Jesse Host

I don't know. I don't know if that's the—they changed it, though. Didn't they sell that to somebody?

00:30:37 Alan Guest

I don't know. There's a big, beautiful like deco building that's the Sears building in east LA.

00:30:48 Jesse Host

And it was just—there's like a little railroad system of these cars that come chugging down like from upstairs, the bigger part of the warehouse to the sorting room. And you—

00:30:49 Alan Guest

This is like for mail order?

Yeah. You know, so it's all—all the different bins have numbers on them. Like number three, that's Seattle. Number four, that's Tacoma. Whatever it was. You know. And you would have to take the item and match it to the appropriate bin, and sometimes it would be something that would weigh an ounce or sometimes it would be a 12-foot-long box filled with a swing set that would weigh like 115 pounds. And—

00:31:12 Jesse Host

I can only imagine that like being there—it's not that you—I mean, maybe you did think that you were better than it, but it's not even that. It's like it must be like wondering, "Wait, before, when I was in a famous movie, that was a fraud?"

00:31:38 Alan Guest

Well, it just was—you know, a bucket of cold water that reminded me how lucky I had been up until that point. Because I know a number of people who are very talented, and they just never got the

breaks. You know? So, I was lucky. And you know, when people win Oscars and so forth and—I don't remember a lot of them talking about how lucky they have been. You know? They thank the appropriate people, and that's—you know—proper. But it just was like I caught some big breaks. I got a Broadway show. I got a big movie because of the Broadway show. And then, you know, I just ran into some—into a rough patch. And so, it was just like, "Right. This is, um—this is—this is the real world. And that other world is—I hope to get back there, 'cause it sure was fun. But I don't know."

I was scared. I was scared that, you know, it might not work. I was—

00:32:39 Jesse Host
00:32:40 Alan Guest

And you were drinking too, at the time?

Oh! Oh yeah! *[Laughs.]* Yeah. I did that job, and then I had a couple of nice jobs come my way, a TV show and a movie while I was at Sears Warehouse. And so, then I thought I was back in business. And then, the TV show was only on for one year. And then, that movie came and went. And then, I was kind of back to square one. And I was doing pilot season again, and I had really started drinking in earnest when I started on *Biloxi Blues*, when I moved from Chicago to New York. 'Cause we just played soldiers, and after the show every night we'd go out and just slam beers. You know? So, I just started that habit. And then, you know, I enjoyed it, but I just was a terrible thing for anybody probably, but really bad for me.

And I would drink on any occasion. If things were good, I'd drink. If things were bad, I'd drink more. And so, then after that—*Young Guns 2* and this show I did, called *Going Places*, I was back to square one. And it was like I just—I need money. I need to do something, anything, any kind of job. And I wound up being a bartender at The Red Onion, which I don't think exists anymore. And that was a bad job for me, because after my shift was over, I'd park it at the bar. *[Chuckles.]* And you know, use up all my tip money.

00:34:03 Jesse Host
00:34:05 Alan Guest

And you had a family at home at the time.

I had one kid. My ex-wife, Claudia, and our daughter, Emma. And she was little. And then, my manager at the time just called me on my actual birthday, and she said, "I wanna talk to you about something." I was convinced she was gonna drop me. You know? And then she said, "I think you've got a drinking problem, and if you think that's true, I know some people you can talk to." So, I was willing to do anything if it would get me a job. So, it's like, "Oh. I'll try anything." And it worked out.

00:34:40 Jesse Host

Was it hard to be humble enough to take care of yourself in that way? Was it hard to like...?

00:34:49 Alan Guest

I just wanted to—I mean, we're supposed to probably keep some of this anonymous, right? So—but I just—it was just a matter of like if this is what I need to do to make money, then I'm gonna do it. And so, I wasn't happy about it. And, uh, right after I decided to stop drinking, I had an audition that took me to New York for *The Goodbye Girl*, for the musical version of *The Goodbye Girl*, to be a replacement. And you know. So, I was on my own in New York, newly sober. I mean, just like a couple weeks. And I went out to get a steak one night *[laughs]* and the table next to me had ordered red wine, you know, with their steak. And it was like a Hitchcock glass of red wine that just seemed—you know—like the size of a pitcher.

They just seemed amazing and beautiful and powerful. And I had to white-knuckle it through that dinner. You know? And I just ate my steak, and I got the hell out of there.

So, it wasn't—I mean, I think other people have gone through much tougher withdrawals, but I just was determined to make this thing go. If I got another chance to make this thing go, I was gonna take it. And if that meant don't drink, then don't drink.

00:36:18 Jesse Host

Yeah, I mean the thing that I have heard from a lot of people in recovery, and it was a huge part of my childhood, especially 'cause my father was in recovery all my childhood and was a single parent, so I went to meetings with him. Is—

00:36:36 Alan Guest

Wow.

00:36:37 Jesse Host

[*Chuckles.*] I know. Vets' meetings, too. Not just any meetings. But like, one of the things is that when it comes to beating addiction, you can't like beat it by dominating it. You know? You can't beat it like the way a boxer beats another boxer in the ring. Like, you have to acknowledge, you know, the higher power part of AA takes a lot of forms in other forms of recovery, but like that's about acknowledging that the world is bigger than you are and that's essential to it.

00:37:13 Alan Guest

Absolutely. Truthfully, all a human being can control is their own behavior. And then, maybe at some point you get a hold of your thought process, and you can start to weed out the crap from your thoughts, but that's maybe the last thing to come. You can learn to control your behavior and what you say and what you do. And you know. So, people turn to sources of power greater than themselves, because—beyond controlling your own behavior—you have no control over anything in this world. And you just—it's humbling, and you just have to just, you know, accept that as true. You don't have to like it. I don't like it to this day! Not really. But you know, I know that... well, I think if I hadn't stopped all that time ago, I think I may be dead now.

So, it was just—it's all life-affirming, and it's just a way to stay on track and be useful, you know. Useful to your family, useful to your kids, useful to your friends. Useful to the people that employ you. And be dependable, be somebody that they can count on. And that's pretty wonderful. That's worth everything.

00:38:44 Jesse Host

I mean, that's at the heart of being an actor. If you can't be dependable to the other people in a production, whether it's onstage or onscreen, what's the point of—? I mean, 'cause one person can take down the whole house of cards.

00:39:01 Alan Guest

Yeah. Well, I—you know, for somebody at my level, it could just mean truly screwing up any career in television and motion pictures because, you know, word gets around. And directors and producers are brutally honest with each other, 'cause like, "What about this guy?"

And if you say, "Oh yeah, good guy. Give him a shot." And then he turns out to ruin your show, you're never gonna trust that producer or that director again! And that could mean they don't get hired! So, everybody is very honest about this stuff. And if you're problematic, it gets—it's gonna get around.

00:39:42 Jesse Host

Much more with Alan Ruck from *Succession*. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye*, from [MaximumFun.org](https://www.maximumfun.org) and NPR.

00:39:49	Promo	Clip	<p>Music: Bright acoustic guitar.</p> <p>John Moe: Hey, it's John Moe, inviting you to listen to <i>Depresh Mode with John Moe</i>, where I talk about mental health and the lives we live with all kinds of people. Famous writers.</p> <p>David Sedaris, welcome to <i>Depresh Mode</i>.</p> <p>David Sedaris: Thanks so much for having me.</p> <p>John: Movie stars.</p> <p>Jamie Lee Curtis, welcome to <i>Depresh Mode</i>.</p> <p>Jamie Lee Curtis: I am happy to be here.</p> <p>John: Musicians.</p> <p>I am in St. Paul, Minnesota, and I'm talking to Aimee Mann.</p> <p>Aimee Mann: Great to talk to you.</p> <p>John: And song exploders.</p> <p>Hrishikesh Hirway, welcome to <i>Depresh Mode</i>.</p> <p>Hrishikesh Hirway: Thanks so much for having me.</p> <p>John: Everyone's opening up on <i>Depresh Mode</i>, on Maximum Fun.</p>
00:40:25	Music	Transition	<i>[Music ends.]</i>
00:40:30	Jesse	Host	<p>Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.</p> <p>I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest, Alan Ruck, plays Connor on the HBO show <i>Succession</i>.</p> <p>You ended up working on <i>Spin City</i>, which is basically the greatest job you could ever have.</p> <p><i>[Alan chuckles.]</i></p> <p>Which is you're working with a bunch of really—and <i>Spin City</i> is a very good show. It's not a world-changing—you know, it's not <i>Cheers</i>, but a very good show that ran for a long time with really great people in it. And like, it's a job! Which sounds like what you really just wanted was, "Can I please have a job?"</p>
00:41:04	Alan	Guest	<p>It was the—I was 40 years old when I got that, and it was the first time I felt like I had won the lotto, because it was—because of Michael J. Fox, we knew it was gonna run. And we had tremendous writers. I mean, really funny people. Bill Lawrence and Gary David Goldberg and then everybody that was in that writers' room there just really, really funny, smart people. So—and they gave me that part, which was kind of a license to steal. But I've hung on basically to everyone from <i>Spin</i>, and I feel that same way about <i>Succession</i>. I just—I have—I've had a ball working with them. And I'm constantly astonished at how good they are.</p>

And you couldn't—I mean, the writing was so inspiring. The writing is so good, but everybody—from word go—brought their A game. And it was like, you—even if you thought about phoning it in, you can't. 'Cause you're just gonna get trampled. You know? So, you have to suit up and show up and just give it everything you got. And it—you know—pays dividends.

00:42:19 Jesse Host

I mean, the thing about *Succession* is—right? You're whatever you were, you know, in your late 50s or whatever, when you got cast on this show. And you had already had two career-defining jobs. Right? You were all—you had been the guy from *Ferris Bueller* for a while, and then you were a sitcom guy. A successful sitcom guy on a good sitcom who did a good job. You know, great work if you can get it. And you know, maybe you—maybe you get cast on a *CSI* or a—you know? Like, you get some kind of regular job after that, but you don't necessarily expect that you're gonna end up on a *Succession*. [Chuckling.] You know what I mean?

00:43:05 Alan Guest

No, not even a little bit. I tell people this, but it's true. It's not a joke. I totally coat-tailed on my wife, Mireille Enos, because we got together. We did a play in New York, and we started dating. And she said, "But I'm gonna move to Los Angeles, 'cause my manager says it's time for me to do that." And he was right. And so, she came out here and I chased her. And casting agents found out that we were together, and they would say, "Do you know who she's with?" "She's with Alan." And they—'cause they kind of forgot about me in a way, 'cause I was a New York guy for a long time. So, the LA people, they wouldn't—you know. There was a time when they would fly you across the country to audition for stuff, but they had stopped doing that by this point.

And, "Oh! She's with him?" And they would say, "Bring him in for that loser." You know, "Bring him in for that—you know, that guy. He's be good for that." And so, then I kind of got back in. You know? And, um—

00:44:05 Jesse Host

"We got a—we got a sad guy we're looking for."

00:44:07 Alan Guest

Yeah! You know. "We got this—the mopey guy!" So—

00:44:12 Jesse Host

Who quips! He occasionally quips.

00:44:14 Alan Guest

Occasionally. You know, if you give him some words. So, I got back in, and then there was one pilot season where I just—nothing happened. So, I told myself I'm gonna take every episodic job that comes along. And in one season, I did nine episodics and one pilot. I mean, it was great. It's like having a steady job, 'cause like every other week I was doing something different. You know? And I had a lot of fun doing that. And then, I got a job that shot in Mexico City—a series that didn't go anywhere. I mean, they aired it, but it just—it was called *Persons Unknown*, and it remained unknown. And then, um, Mireille got *The Killing* right when she got pregnant with our now 12-year-old daughter.

And so, for a while I was Mr. Mom, because I'd go with the baby and Mireille to the set in Vancouver. She'd go away for an hour and a half or whatever, do a setup, and she'd come back. She'd feed the baby on one side and pump the other side out and hand the baby back to me. And that's how we did that whole first season of *The Killing*. It was—you know, it was great. It was like—yeah, it's her time. You know? And then, little by little I started getting these jobs, like that job with Geena Davis. And it was off that—while I was

00:45:43 Jesse Host doing that job that I got *Succession*. It just kind of fell in my lap. So, it was a great stroke of luck.
I mean, it's funny, because I think that each portion of your career, you had to find that lane. Right? Like, in the *Ferris Bueller* days, you had to learn how to deal with being a guy that looks ten years younger than you were. In the *Spin City* days, you had to figure out how to credibly be a believable adult man onscreen, and it involved a brush cut and a lot of rude, cutting remarks.

[Alan confirms.]

00:46:46 Alan Guest And then, you know, now—in your like late 50s and early 60s—you are able to use those same qualities that made you a sweet guy when you were—you know, a sweet teen when you were 25 or whatever really serve you as like an older man. Right? Like, you're not gonna be—you know, you're not gonna be the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff in a—

00:46:47 Jesse Host No, that's not gonna happen.
—*Independence Day 5*. But like, this is like the—what a wonderful venue for—

00:46:54 Alan Guest Yeah, well, I don't think I've—I don't think I found a lane. I think the lane found me. You know? But look, however they wanna use me, I'm just happy to still be in the game. I enjoy it. I actually don't like watching myself. I do watch myself on *Succession*, because the show is so good, and I wanna see what all my friends did. But oftentimes, I'm happy to leave the work onset. I love the doing of it. I love being on the set. I love—I love everything about it. But I have watched *Succession*, just because it's so dang good.

00:47:33 Jesse Host I find it very emotionally trying.

[Alan laughs.]

00:47:38 Alan Guest Really. I feel like I've gone through it.

00:47:39 Jesse Host The whole series?

00:47:43 Alan Guest Yeah, gone through a laundry wringer—a mangler.

00:47:45 Jesse Host Do you feel like you need to take a shower? [Laughs.]

Yeah, it's just—it's so—it's really funny, but I was like—I did not ever expect that they would make a more intense version of *The Thick of It*.

[Alan laughs.]

00:48:00 Alan Guest Like, I was like—when I was there, I was—but now, it's—[sighs].
Yeah.

00:48:05 Jesse Host Yeah. But they're just that good. They're just that good. I—
Can—do you like go home to your wife and say, "You won't believe—you won't believe the sentence that was in the script today!" [Laughs.]

00:48:13 Alan Guest Oh yeah! I mean, some of the craziest stuff that I've had to say or some of the other put downs. There was—the character of Nate says to Siobhan about Tom, "He's a corn-fed basic from hockey town."

[Jesse laughs.]

00:48:57	Jesse	Host	I mean, that's poetic! It's just a beautiful way to really slam someone down to the ground. It's endless. You know. It's endless. A lot of good ones come out of Tom's mouth. Or you know, Siobhan said about me, you know, "The first pancake." It's just—you know, so amazingly rude and so funny, wonderfully funny. [Chuckles.] Alan Ruck, I sure appreciate your time. Thank you for coming on <i>Bullseye</i> .
00:49:00	Alan	Guest	It's my pleasure. Thank you.
00:49:02	Jesse	Host	Alan Ruck. You can watch him on the fourth and final season of <i>Succession</i> , which is airing now on HBO.
00:49:10	Music	Transition	Bright, cheerful synth with a steady beat.
00:49:13	Jesse	Host	That's the end of another episode of <i>Bullseye</i> . <i>Bullseye</i> is created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California. Although, I am just back from greater Mexico City, Mexico—which is just an awesome, awesome place. I will—let me say this. If you're in Mexico City, a deeply underrated museum is the Museo Franz Mayer. Which has just an unbelievable collection of decorative arts. And then, also has two great shows up right now: one of the incredible Mexican designer, Carla Fernández, and her gorgeous clothes and a big collection of design by women that is so cool. There's a lot of great museums in Mexico City, but that one really blew my mind.
			Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers are Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey. Our production fellows at Maximum Fun are Tabatha Myers and Bryanna Paz. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music is composed and provided to us by DJW, also known as Dan Wally. Our theme song is by The Go! Team. It's called "Huddle Formation". Our thanks to The Go! Team, one of the great bands. Go see them in concert. Our thanks to their label, Memphis Industries. They both agreed to share that song with us. We're always grateful.
			<i>Bullseye</i> is on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. Find us there, follow us. We will share all of our interviews with you. And I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.
00:50:57	Promo	Promo	Speaker: <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.
			[Music fades out.]